The background of the cover is a photograph of the interior of a Gothic cathedral. The view is looking up from a lower level towards a higher level. In the foreground, there are several pointed Gothic arches supported by stone columns. Above these arches is a balcony with a decorative stone railing. The balcony is supported by a series of smaller arches. Behind the balcony, there are three large, tall stained glass windows with intricate designs. The top of the image shows the high, vaulted ceiling of the cathedral, with light filtering through the windows, creating a warm, golden glow. The overall atmosphere is one of grandeur and historical significance.

Volume 1, Number 1, 2012

Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

**The Oral Reality:
From Rural to Hi-Tech Communities**
Lovejoy • Terry • Stringer • LeFever • Evans • Stahl



International Orality Network

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Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

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Cover Photo

The picture of the most important church in Prague, parts of this castle—building complex started in the tenth century. This church took over six hundred years to complete her construction; her design influenced the architecture of churches across Central Europe and as far as England. She stood during the time when oral culture was thriving; she witnessed the printing age; now, she is gliding into the digital age.

My people, hear my teaching;
listen to the words of my mouth.
I will open my mouth with a parable;
I will utter hidden things, things from of old—
things we have heard and known,
things our ancestors have told us.
We will not hide them from their descendants;
we will tell the next generation
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord,
his power, and the wonders he has done.

Psalm 78:1--4 (NIV)

Orality Journal

The Word Became Fresh

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. It is published online semi-annually and aims to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary, serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news. Occasionally, print editions will be created. Submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement are welcomed.

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Website: www.internationaloralitynetwork.org

Editorial Email:

oralityjournal@gmail.com

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National Christian Foundation

A/C 429666

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Editor's Notes

by *Samuel E. Chiang*

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the Orality Journal.

Irony is not lost that we are moving to include a print mode to express the importance of this multi-discipline and multi-faceted matter of orality. So why another journal, and why now? Let us explore together.

A Gutenberg Parentheses*

Communications from creation to about the time of the Gutenberg Press were primarily oral in nature as writing systems took time to develop and technology for mass printing had not yet arrived. In the fifteenth century the Gutenberg Press allowed printing en mass; this, coupled with the Reformation, where the Church enthusiastically declared that all should be able to read, fueled the trend toward reading, literacy, and privacy. Memory (community and social memory), which was at the core of society, got outsourced to the containers of paper and filing cabinets.

Oral cultures value face-to-face communication, in context, and living within the 'story' of the community. The literate world communicates through textual means and often is not able to convey the whole context in a communiqué. The textual 'story' is truncated or emptied of meaning. As we enter the digital culture, one that is defined by collaborating with multimodal content and tasks, strangely we are on a converging trajectory with the oral culture.

In fact, academicians are labeling the period from the fifteenth to the twentieth century the Gutenberg Parentheses: a period where the left side of the brain took over and gave birth to sciences, inventions, and philosophies, but silenced the right side of the brain from creativity. Proceeding into the twenty-first century, the captured images, reality entertainment, and online video gaming actually mirror closer to the pre-Gutenberg era, where the right side of the brain was much more in concert with the left side. The result is once again a more holistic approach to society and tasks, thereby recapturing creativity, collaboration, and community.

In oral cultures, the information is local and always rooted in context and history, so that there is meaning with coherence to the community. In digital culture, like that of Facebook postings, the emphasis is on morphing the private and individual into open, specific, contextual, and communal experiences, albeit at a distance.

This form of communal experience with a digital identity and digital narrative imbedded into social networking is reinforced by the F-Factor—fans, friends, and followers. So pervasive is this practice that we often discover products and services by relying on our social networks. We are conscious of how our postings will be rated. We are constantly seeking feedback both to improve and validate decisions. Our social networks (communities) are often buying together, and our digital communities are themselves becoming products and services. The F-Factor put in a hard closing parenthesis to the Gutenberg Press, period!

A Rummage Sale

The Church can be described as a large social network and in her book, *The Great Emergence*, Phyllis Tickle has suggested that it is experiencing what amounts to a large rummage sale, one that happens every five hundred years. In the midst of the convergence of oral, literate, and digital culture, coupled with online digital identity and narrative, and further combined with the phenomena of the Gutenberg Parentheses, what does the Church have to say and how do we move forward in this very fluid state?

During the recent International Orality Network mini-global consultation, “Beyond Western Literate Models: Contextualizing Theological Education in Oral Contexts” (hosted at the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College), forty-two academicians and practitioners from eighteen institutions and fourteen organizations indicated (1) an abundance of oral preference learners in the classrooms, (2) the need to embrace orality as a part of the curriculum, and (3) that what is working on the field is now beginning to speak into formal education, offering rippling implications for accreditation. This is a defining moment for us to explore and learn together!

With the hard close of the Gutenberg Parentheses and the onset of the great emergence, we continue with the residual effects of the print-based culture, and we are rediscovering the ancient keys to the oral cultures that are infused with visual digital effects. Thus, we commence this new journey with a journal.

Orality Journal is the journal of the International Orality Network. Since the network is based on the voluntarism of individual and organizational members, this journal is your journal. We plan to publish this journal online, semi-annually. We aim to provide a platform for scholarly discourse on the issues of orality, discoveries of innovations in orality, and praxis of effectiveness across multiple domains in society. This online journal is international and interdisciplinary serving the interests of the orality movement through research articles, documentation, book reviews, and academic news. Similar to this inaugural issue which is printed, from time to time we will also print other editions.

We welcome submission of items that could contribute to the furtherance of the orality movement. In future editions, we will commence other departments, including a section on book reviews and noteworthy articles. We also welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions! Send your feedback to: oralityjournal@gmail.com.

Journeying with you,

Samuel E. Chiang
From Abuja, Nigeria

Endnote

*For a more complete discussion please refer to the chapter "*Three Worlds Converged: Living in an Oral, Literate, and Digital Culture*", James R. Krabill, gen. ed.; Frank Fortunato, Robin Harris, and Brian Schrag, eds., *Worship and Mission for the Global Church: An Ethnodoxology Handbook* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2012).



One Thousand Orphans Tell God's Story

by Marlene LeFever

Marlene LeFever is Vice President of Educational Development for David C. Cook Global Mission. She developed the orality unit mentioned in this article. For a free copy and to receive updates on this orphan initiative, email her at marlene.lefever@davidccook.org.

“**B**y the end of the month, you’ll be able to do something most pastors can’t do!” The auntie smiled at her club of forty orphans meeting outside a home in the foothills of the Himalayas. They were meeting three times a week for what the children called their “Jesus Fun Club.”

“You’ll be able to tell the whole big, exciting, amazing story of the Bible!”

This woman—and dozens of Christian workers like her—spent the month of December 2011 in India, showing children that the Bible is not a book of unrelated stories. Instead, it’s one beautiful story of a Heavenly Father’s love. During that Christmas month, over one thousand orphans in dozens of India’s eighteen thousand Christian orphanages learned that their Heavenly Father moved heaven and earth to prove his love for them.

The twelve lessons, given three a week for four weeks, followed



a familiar pattern to people involved in the orality movement.

First, the auntie (a respectful title for the club leader) would tell or read the story. The big redemption story is part of David C. Cook’s Global Mission club project for orphans and other children at risk. The story began with the Creation, followed by the Fall, life outside the Garden, the great flood, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, and the parts



they played in the redemption story. Then Jesus, our Redeemer, came. He lived, died, and rose again for us. Finally, the children learned the great, glorious end of the story: they would have a real home with their Father God forever.

After each day's portion of the story, the children divided into pairs and told the story to each other. "You forgot the part about God's promise to Noah," Afreen grinned as she corrected her partner. "I think the rainbow is the prettiest part!"

At this point, the children had heard or told the story portion three times. Next, they discussed it. They were encouraged to think more deeply than simply giving fill-in-the-blank answers. In the segment about Noah, they

answered these questions:

- People died in this story. How do you know that God wanted to save the other people, too?
- The Bible tells us that God shut the door. Why is that important to the story?
- What did you learn about God from this story?

Each child had a personal story that brought him or her to the orphanage. Those stories were filled with pain and danger.

One child's father hung his mother.

One girl's mother had leprosy, and although the girl was healthy, she will always be viewed in her society as untouchable. She will only marry if she marries another healthy child of a leper.

Another child was HIV-positive, although he didn't know it yet. His father was dead, and his mother dying.

A young teen was left by her mother with the promise that in a week she would return to the orphanage to bring her home. That was seven years ago.

Their own stories made God's special story of love precious to them. They learned the Bible's promise that no matter how hard things are, these children will always have a Father God. They are not alone. "I used to want to kill my father because he killed my mother," Preetham admitted. "Now, the big Bible story showed me that God forgave me. I won't kill my father when I grow up. Instead I'll find him, and tell him that God forgives him, and I do, too."

After the children heard the story and discussed it, they read the story in their *Action Bibles*, a comic-book-style Bible that covers most of the stories in scripture. Using *The Action Bible* breaks with a strict orality pattern. Because most of these children will have a better future

if they can master English, *The Action Bible* was used to help them learn the language. Their eyes moved back and forth from the words to the pictures, confirming what they heard and read, and enlarging their vocabulary.

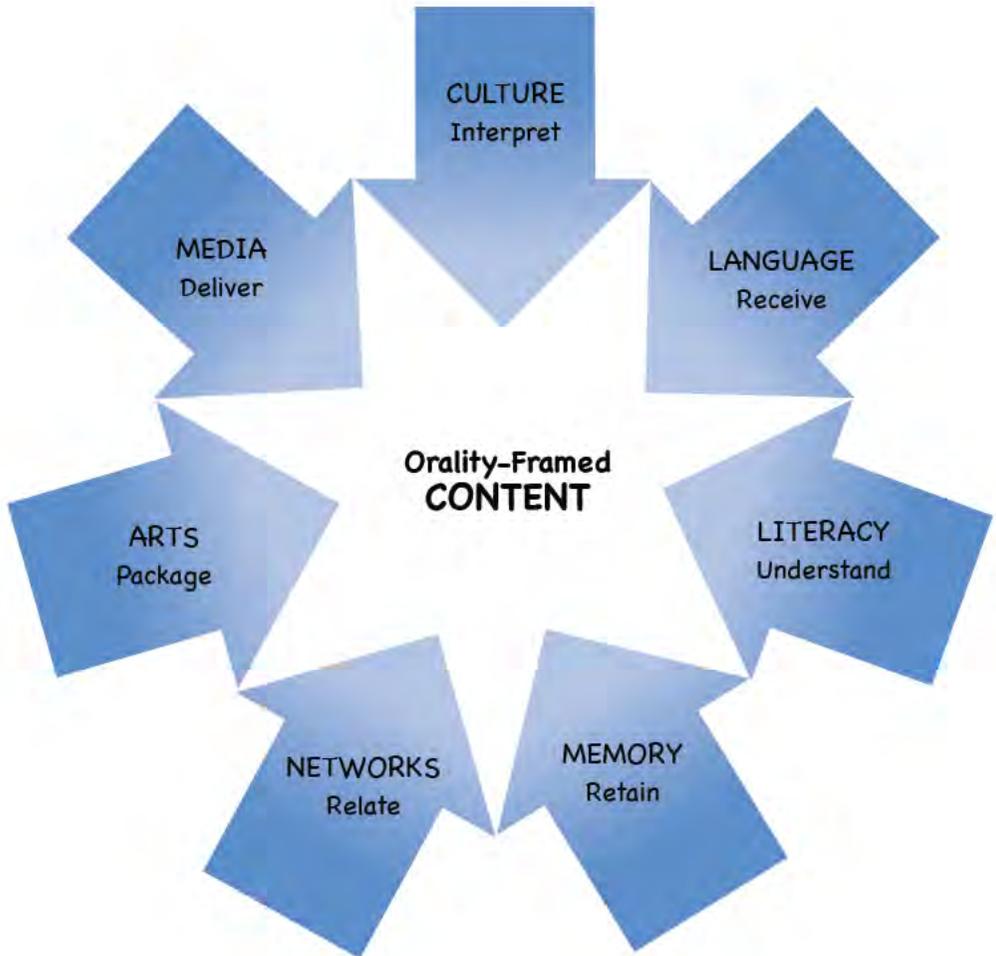
The auntie was almost finished with the day's part of the big Bible story. "I want you to tell today's story to one other person before we meet again. It can be someone who is in this club, or it can be someone who isn't here. Tell it over and over so you'll never forget what your real Father has done for all his children."

Ayesha came up to the auntie after the club ended. "I can tell the whole story perfectly," she announced. "All the parts we've learned so far! Want to hear me?" Auntie knew she would miss her bus and have to wait an hour to catch the next one. She smiled and sat down. "I'd love to, Ayesha." As Ayesha started to tell the most wonderful story ever told, the other children settled down close to the auntie and listened one more time.

Their own stories made God's special story of love precious to them.



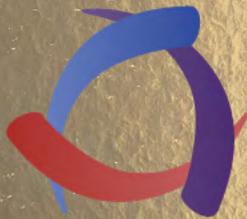
SEVEN DISCIPLINES OF ORALITY: A Holistic Model



Courtesy of Global Impact Mission as is published in Missiology April 2010. Dr. Chuck Madinger leads Global Impact Mission and serves on the International Orality Network's Leadership Team facilitating the Research Task Force.

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